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# THE CRAYON.

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[WHOLE NO. XXVII.]

## THE SPIRIT OF ART.

BETWEEN the Art which we call ancient and that which we call modern, there is a line of demarcation, the exact nature of which it is well worth while to determine. The difference between the schools of the middle ages, and those of this age, is so great, and, at the same time, so universally manifested through all the variations in the Art of each time, that it could neither be the result of circumstances, nor of national character, but of essentially differing spirits animating each era. From Naples to Flanders the mediæval Art is earnest, deep-toned, and dignified, while from our west to the furthest civilized east, the Art of this day is, as a whole, superficial and foolish. It was not the Catholic religion which caused the difference, for the Catholic artists of this day are no better than the Protestant—it was not a better knowledge of the principles of Art, for all intellectual and moral science is better understood now than then. Nor was it in better instruction that those elder men had an advantage over us: Giotto was not as good a draughtsman as Ingres, and there are scores of young artists in the French life schools, who can draw a figure more accurately than could the restorer of painting, or any of his immediate successors.

Not to prolong a blind examination of things not all to the point, we will go at once to that which seems to us the true cause of the difference. The middle age artist worked in a spirit of reverence and profound humility. He believed in something over and above him, for which he labored. It might have been religion—it might have been superstition, which was the life of his effort—it does not matter—it was not the thought of himself. Believing in something higher and more worthy than he was, he did not place himself on the summit of the pyramid which he built. He regarded himself but as the instrument of his Art, and taking his measure by a loftier standard, he was led continually to look upward, and thus derived a dignity from the consciousness of being connected with that above him, whatever it might have been. This dignity became a characteristic of all that he did. Walking reverently among men and before Nature, he believed himself an appointed servant of a sovereign who deserved his most earnest effort, and this faith in himself begot in others faith in him, and men accepted him as a revelator, reverencing and honoring him for his work's sake.

But our modern artist is, with few ex-

ceptions, the acme of his own creation—he recognizes nothing above him, and reverences nothing more than himself. Now, we believe it to be a truth, that a man never overestimates himself, though he may, in comparison, underrate everything, and everybody, else. Being, therefore, the standard by which he measures everything, how can it be possible that Nature should have any dignity to him, much less, how can he derive dignity from her service. So he brings her to him, and selects, rejects, and amends, as though he were the *model* to which all things must conform. That which he likes, is good—that which he likes not, is bad. Without elevating himself even in his own estimation, he degrades all things around him, and works in a spirit of arrogance and insolence, therefore a foolish spirit.

This is the essential difference between the two. The former being reverential looks upward, and so becomes spiritual and exalted by the things he regards; while the latter, looking down on all things, becomes material and degraded; each one assuming the character of the things he contemplates. The qualities which we admire in the early painters become evident then as not belonging to themselves by nature, but as derived from the habit they were in of regarding the subjects of their Art, being a tone shed over their works by an inner light; while we are material, not because the spiritual world of Art is further from us than from them, but because we contemplate only material subjects of artistic study. Subject, indeed, has become something of almost entire indifference, and the qualities with which the artist himself induces the work, are the points of admiration and criticism. It may be a marketing—it may be the Alps—the 'breadth,' the 'handling,' the 'tone,'—the 'method' in short, being the same in all cases, and constituting the value of the work.

The artist, then, is no longer the servant of his Art, but it, rather, the minister to his importance, and having its apex in him. How, then, can it elevate him, or give him faith in himself and his mission; and not having faith in himself, how shall the world have faith in him? Is it any wonder, then, that we have in these days no festivals like those which greeted the production of works of Art in the days of Cimabue, whose Madonna was received with such a procession and such manifestations of joy, as we greet a conqueror or a favorite statesman with? The spirit in which Cimabue worked, and in which his

works were received, was the essential spirit of Christianity, whether he himself was a Christian or not. It was reverence and forgetfulness of self, and the ascription of all the glory and honor of Art to Nature and God. The spirit in which we work is that of self-exaltation and self-glorification, a spirit not only not that of Christianity, but not even so dignified as that of Paganism, which supposes something better than ourselves to worship; lower than Fetichism, which supposes a power to be conciliated—it is Self-worship, materialism in its grossest form—and, if this be the spirit of modern Art, what kind of worth or vitality shall we attribute to its works—and is it any wonder that the devotees of a creed so degraded should find few so poor as to do them reverence?

## ART-EXPRESSION.

OCCASIONALLY one may find in a *café* of Rome or Florence, pencil-marks upon the small marble tables which are worth studying. Bold, free, sketching lines—landscape, historic, ideal, fragmentary—bits of everything, yet drawn with a power seldom found in the completed pictures of the artists who have traced these upon the coffee-stained stone. Not unfrequently may be heard, too, a "sketching" sentence uttered while "in the liberty," to use an expressive phrase of our Methodist brethren, by one whose planned sentences are anything but great; I have heard words struck out, when two minds of equal strength, but of unequal quality, came in contact, that were as rough and burning with gold, as any fragments of quartz smitten from the jagged ledge by Californian's hammer. Truths are set free which were never "thought out" by the speaker; felt by him, in their full profundity—but which he would be the last one to realize, should he attempt the task of their analyzation. I like that thing in Art. That simple, yet mysterious process of revelation—that unconscious grasp of those principles which still elude the touch of science, and, child-like, play with powers that terrify the intellectual world. The faculty seems a foretaste of that other state—and there never has been, there is not, nor can there ever be, any Art without it. All that a picture has, which is not of this power, is not Art, and should be discharged from the canvas forthwith—that is, in our estimation of the work, as an Art-work.

Yet there may be many points in a painting which are of this faculty, and bear evidence to the truthfulness of the artist, which are not in themselves artistic, but simple and priceless blunders, betraying that the record was made under circumstances of rare exaltation, or during the painful enthusiasm resulting from too great an influx of beauty from God's Nature, or of life from His breath. Thus, it is said, that Michael Angelo's Moses has an absurd anatomical error in the insertion of one of

the muscles of the arm. I do not know if it be so, not having examined it with reference to its science, nor do I know the exact geological structure of the stone in which it is carved—yet I hope there is an error there—a definite, undeniable fault—a palpable, sublime blunder, if for no other reason than to prove to the world, that with all his masterly anatomy, there was something greater in Michael Angelo that mastered *that*. Thus, too, in a landscape of inestimable value, painted by a young man who will soon be recognized as a teacher as well as student. The pale glory of an Alpine morning pours down through an opening among the mountains upon the placid Lucerne. In Nature the scene fills one with a sense of infinitude. *Infinite* is the only word he would use in relation to it—unbounded variations in forms—in light and shade—in color—in tone—and actually endless in combinations. •Fleeting—evanescent—so that its phenomena of change are used to express the subtle sense of those words—who shall grasp it? This man has. But, observe. Dashing over the brink of a precipice, is a fall—“like a downward smoke”—and, in the mist, going up to mingle with the morning mist of the heights, a rainbow is painted—delicately transparent—but its arch, of course, is drawn *between* the spectator and the sun. Sir David Brewster would think this unpardonable, and would give you in two problems and one diagram, the whole truth of the matter, so that a blind man might understand, and understand as well as one who is not blind. This is well. But the artist felt that all he has painted, and immeasurably more—crowded in upon his spirit—overflowing his problems, and obliterating the lines of his diagrams—bewildering his poor brain, and he has given you all he could of it—that is all. What the faculty, dealing thus directly with the true, is, I will not attempt to decide: whether it results from power delegated to us—made ours through the miracle of our creation—or whether it is “reflected light,” I care not. I fail to perceive, even in the most shadowy sense, the why and wherefore of a grasshopper’s existence. It may be doubtful if philosophers understand any clearer why a bud unfolds now, than they did in the days of Job; and, as long as that remains an impenetrable mystery, one may be pardoned for believing that that other mystery—involving all finite mysteries, as its existence involves all other finite existence—that spiritual being—life and light—may still be hidden from the knowledge of men: I only know that when we would follow up its current, we find ourselves looking God-ward—therefore, it is spiritual; therefore, it is religious; therefore, all Art is religious.

Thus, I think that the faculty of perceiving the Beautiful is religious in its nature—because that life, that receptive life into which the Beautiful falls—and which it cannot approximate unless there has been a fine preparation—a subtle atonement—is the inner life—the superintellectual nature. The vibrations must be coincident, otherwise, although there may be eyes to see and beauty to be seen, there will be no perception. Many eyes may look upon the violet, and still the secret of the violet shall be revealed to few who gaze. He alone has seen it who has discovered its

idea, its spirit—that is, has apprehended the relation it bears to the soul, or heart, or what you will of human beings; and to what spiritual attribute it is correspondent. I do not mean to say that it is necessary for him to *think* of all this; often, it is better that he should not; but, it is absolutely essential that he should *feel* these relations. Feel them as Wordsworth did when he wrote that priceless little poem—that pearl secretion—in which the verse occurs, beginning, “A violet by a mossy stone.” Those signs of relations, subtle tones, and hues, and odors, may be found running through, and mingling in almost inextricable confusion with all conventional and arbitrary modes of expression. Men utter their ideas in two languages, always. Mark, I say their ideas, not their emotions. First, by those signs which men have agreed shall indicate ideas; meaningless characters or sounds made significantly by common consent. It is by the help of these conventional modes that men lie—they are more apt in framing falsehood, than in revealing truth. Lawyers understand this, and know how difficult it is to construct a sentence which shall not express something else than the severe truth. But, there is a language above *that*—a mode of revelation most wonderful in its nature, the chief element of cognition in all communication—despising all conventionalities; or rather holding on its course of expression in calm dignity uttering truth, obedient to that alone. We try a man’s tongue by the light of his eyes. We are informed by it on all occasions. It whispered, as the child told the unrealized falsehood, more in that one minute than could be written in a volume, of temptation, of conflict, of concealment, of suffering, and of warning prophecy: it shed its light unperceived by him, over the altar-piece of the false artist; and we cannot pray in its presence; it lays its fingers gently upon the strings, and the tones suffer an indescribable change, so that although the notes of the anthem are followed—we hear blasphemy. But, when the conventional language corresponds to the natural, *there* is power, there is security; and no criticism is just which does not take that correspondence into consideration as the principal element of criticism.

Perhaps the finest illustration of simple and profound harmony subsisting between the language of a people and its thought, may be found in the Indian dialects of America; not only do particular words bear evidence to an exquisite obedience to the expressional laws of sounds and intervals, enabling one who may be wholly ignorant of their conventional power, to judge in some measure of the ideas which they indicate; but the whole language exists as a musical expression of the nature of the continent before it became the echo of European discord. Observe the fine alliteration in the word Mississippi—speak it as an Indian speaks it, it is a river of sound. Pronounce the word *Katadn*. Is there not something cliff-like in its majestic abruptness? Something about it, lofty, isolated, sublime—like that mountain whose name it is—rising in solitary grandeur above the lonely woods of Maine? Take the map of America, and repeat the Indian names of rivers, which we have had the wisdom to preserve, from Maine to the

Gulf of Mexico: the sounds will be found to bear a truly wonderful relation to the physical conditions of the regions passed over. You feel the imprisonment of ice, and the gloom of black waters—flowing far through the perpetual shades of sighing wildernesses of pine—in the name of *Mat-tawankag*. All the blandness of the fragrant south—the fullness of summer noons—is felt in that one word *Alabama*. The whole spirit of Art is in those names; and they should stand side by side with the symphonies of Beethoven—with the best pictures, and the finest statues.

I reserve for a future opportunity the further investigation of this intensely interesting subject of the artistic nature of the Indian dialects; at present merely referring to it to illustrate the principle of harmony between ideas, and natural and artificial language—these dialects being founded as arbitrary modes of expression in strict obedience to the harmonies of Nature. I need not speak of the influence which music exerts over the human soul—that is a recognized, an universally acknowledged power—but the full expressional laws of sound are not fully recognized: only occasionally a man comes who listens; then, under the influence of the significant harmonies he has apprehended, he reveals the records of memory, or the truths his soul has found—and the world receives a poem, or a miserere.

There are those who seek to find the laws of sound, and those of color, identical—but with vain endeavor: their laws *accord*: and a principle which conflicts with one, must assuredly be found antagonistical to the other. Therefore, have I spoken of the Art addressed to the ear, as being a more universally known Art—in fact, known wherever the human voice is heard, in connection with that other Art addressed to the vision, which, being less understood, and in some wise more incapable of demonstration, must be tried by its accordance or conflict, with accepted truths. That which is questioned must be measured by the unquestioned—depth of shade, by quantity of light.

It has been a source of regret that we have not in America works of Art sufficiently great to be used as standards to which one may refer as illustrations of Art-ideas: but, in respect to principles of *color*, this want will not be felt much longer; for there is, while I am writing, a painting on its way to America, which, in connection with the studies of Titian made by Page, will serve to multiply and elevate the public taste. In my next paper I will endeavor, by the help of this picture, to make more clear my ideas of intuitive perception, and of the supreme importance of the *natural* signs of ideas, in Art. In the meantime, let me ask your consideration of one great quality of the picture referred to—its *tone*, as related to its theme. It may seem strange that among the ten thousand pictures that are sold in this country every year, as works of the old masters, one should remain to hang, month after month, in the shop of a dealer, uncalled for, unrecognized: yet it will not seem strange that it was found and known at a glance, when the nature of its discoverer is more completely understood. But, it will be seen, by men who know that the subtle individuality of Titian never was

copied, and his method of producing effects never imitated. I have only this to say at present—that I think there is more power in this picture to teach the principles of true Art coloring, than in any picture of Titian's, excepting the St. Peter Martyr. Even *that* does not surpass it in the excellent employment of hues; first, as means of rendering the various truths of the objects represented—but in a far more important sense—as language of itself expressing, independently of the forms used, the idea, as it beamed forth from the brain of one who saw sight as the uttered Word of God.

Paul Akers.

Rome, May, 1855.

## THE WILDERNESS AND ITS WATERS.\*

### CHAPTER XIV.

#### ERRATICS.

THE morning after the storm all was clear and bright again, but the change in the foliage from the preceding day was astonishing indeed. Orange leaves had become crimson, and yellow-green trees stood enveloped in a mellow glory as brilliant as cadmium or chrome-yellow could suggest. It had, doubtless, been coming on some days, but the exceeding clearness of the atmosphere, after the rain, made it more evident. The old mountain opposite seemed to have diminished his distance from us by half, and we could distinguish the individual tree-tops up to his summit.

It being our last day, it became necessary to do all and see all that remained to be done or seen, and we began already to feel unsettled, and the camp, which the day before was so secure and safe a home, seemed somewhat broken up, and open to the wandering winds of heaven. We hurried through breakfast in order to have time to attend to everything, and found that there was nothing to do but to put the things in the boat and start. The guides had told us of a high, and from their description, we imagined, picturesque fall on a stream that emptied into the lake near by, and I begged my companions to go and visit it. The guides had not themselves been to it, and could not give us the route through the woods, nor did they know exactly how far up the stream it was—four or five miles, they thought. Neither Angler nor Student cared to go on such uncertainties, and the guides were evidently disinclined for any such work, as preparatory to the labor of going back, but I was in picturesque fever, and must see the falls, which my imagination pictured as a wilderness-bound Terri—go I must some way. The stream was large, and I could go nearly up to them with a boat, and could follow the bank of the stream on foot the rest of the way; so I calculated the time which the trip would require, bringing myself back by the middle of the afternoon at the very furthest.

I borrowed Angler's compass, having given mine to Simons, took my bowie-knife and a piece of bread, and embarked. The mouth of the brook was broad and deep, and I rowed easily for half a mile, when fallen trees became frequent, and I was often compelled to lift the boat over them

and launch it on the other side. These barriers became more and more frequent, and of greater size, and after about two miles of weary work, I concluded to leave the boat and try my feet. I drew the boat on a piece of sand, on which were some tracks, like those of a large dog, freshly made, and which I supposed to be those of wolves (and in which supposition the guides afterwards confirmed me), and buckling on my knife-belt, plunged into the woods.

A dense thicket of alder skirted the stream, and though possibly a bear might have penetrated it with ease, I was baffled in attempting it. My only guide was the course of the stream, and this was so astonishingly crooked that it was impossible to conjecture what it might be a hundred yards up, so that if I ventured out of the sound of its murmur, I might, in a quarter of a mile, lose it irretrievably; but to work my way through the alders was impossible, and I must venture, so taking to the higher land I tried working my way through a forest of all kinds of trees, which presented the most confused and, apparently, impassable appearance. It was better than the alders, however, but it rather deserved the name of climbing than walking. The ground was rough, huge boulders of granite protruding everywhere, and with their moss concealing the chasms between them. Over these the tree trunks had fallen one over another, until, in many parts, they were so interlaced that I could not have got to the ground if I had tried, and walked for rods without touching it. I contrived to keep within hearing of the brook and to follow its general direction, but by a kind of zig-zagging which would have served a Dutch galliot to get to windward.

The run-ways occasionally helped me some, but then, deer never go on business, and so their way did not coincide with mine far at a time. The hill-side on which I was travelling finally took a wide sweep away from the stream, leaving a broad flat, which, as I looked down on it, showed a mass of alder bushes as dense as those where I landed. I waded the brook, and followed the opposite declivity. This was hardwoodland, and the forest was more open, though even here worse to walk through than anything I had seen before that day. Noon came on, and I had not reached the falls. The gurgle of a little brook coming down the hill-side attracted me, and sitting on a log I dipped my bread into the cool water, and ate it, and then taking a hearty draught from my leather cup, I laved my face in the basin, and much refreshed pursued my way. The deer rushed unseen through the thickets as I approached the coverts which sheltered them, and once I heard a snort like that of a hog started from his wallow, followed by a sound of something clumsily but hastily tearing its way through the bushes and ferns to get out of my way. I suspected it to be a bear, but as I saw nothing of the creature I cannot aver that it was one. I determined to keep on until two o'clock, and then turn back, and as I could not certainly walk more than a mile an hour, I could hardly expect to reach the falls much earlier.

About one, I found a little hillock rising in the midst of an open wood, from the summit of which I could catch glimpses of a blue distance through the trees, and getting a general idea of the lay of the land, I

concluded to make a short cut to the falls, if possible; so marking my course by the compass, I struck boldly through the woods, leaving the stream to its meanderings. After a short walk, I was stopped by a clear, rapid little stream, not mine, that I had followed so far—it might have been a better one, it certainly was far easier to follow, but it ran in the wrong direction, and this brought a serious thought. I had left the water course I had come by, and had struck another, which was no guide at all to me, but rather a perplexity. How was I to regain my clue? In an instant I became bewildered; north, south, east, and west, by a complicated movement lost their places, and the sun stared me in the face from the proper position of the north star. I could not persuade myself that it was not so—all my powers of reasoning left me, and my thoughts became chaos. I had been partially lost in the forest once before, and I knew the feeling, and that to give way to it in such a place as this, is to be irretrievably lost, since this confusion of ideas in a short time amounts to perfect insanity, and the unfortunate bewildered becomes incompetent to make even a slight exertion to recover his way. The thought of spending a night among the wolves, whose traces I had seen in several places on my way, and which I doubted not were watching me then at a distance, was too much to be collected under, and, in a few moments, the blood was rushing through my veins with most unwonted velocity, and I trembled like an aspen from head to foot. With a strong effort I recalled my frightened wits, and sitting down on a log, closed my eyes and *thought*. I remembered that the general direction of my walk had been southerly, and that the lake, at all events, must lie somewhere to the north. Settling this in my mind, I grew quieter, and then disregarding the sun, which still persisted in his tergiversation, I followed the pointing of the needle, keeping a little to the east of north, for I knew the stream run on that side. Fortunately my track lay across the hill from which I had looked out, and now quite reassured, I ascended to the summit, and climbing one of the tallest trees on it, perched myself in the very top where the tough wood bent with me, and swayed back and forth like a bob-o-link on a rush.

The sight here presented was worth some labor, to say nothing of the fright. One wide sea of forest lay around me, rolling in immense billows, and far off to the south-east, the peaks of the Adirondacks rose dim and blue above the horizon. Nearer to the east I recognized the picturesque peak by the lake, but to the south and west, and round to the north, there were no hills of any great size, but an incessant and infinite rolling of green hillocks off into blue space. No water was visible—no clearing—not even the track of a tornado—it was unbroken, unmitigated forest, and the only living thing to be seen was myself, with head and shoulders protruding heavenward from the green mottled mantle. I never felt so much like an interloper in all my life—there was no ground of excuse for me to stand on. But it was grand! Green and orange, and gold and crimson, with broad masses of sombre green breaking into it, and this all spreading away in infinite combination to the pale blue distance. Talk of monotony! Why, there is nothing

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